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WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Preparatory Committee
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Geneva, 19-30 April 1993
Agenda item 5

# STATUS OF PREPARATION OF PUBLICATIONS, STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS FOR THE WORLD CONFERENCE

Note by the Secretariat

Addendum

Contribution by the Réseau Sous-régional
Femmes Africaines et Droits Humains

The attention of the Preparatory Committee is drawn to the attached contribution by the Réseau Sous-régional Femmes Africaines et Droits Humains (REFAD), entitled "Statement by REFAD to the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights".

GE.93-13235 (E)

Statement by REFAD to the United Nations
World Conference on Human Rights

(Vienna, 14-25 June 1993)

The Réseau Sous-régional Femmes Africaines et Droits Humains (REFAD), the Union Inter-Africaine des Droits de l'Homme (UIDH) and the women's development organizations in Africa, signatories of the present statement, hail the initiative taken by the United Nations in organizing a World Conference on Human Rights since, on the verge of the twenty-first century, human rights are still being flouted, particularly in the case of women.

Legal status of women

Although the African States have embraced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ratified certain international and regional human rights conventions, African women do not fully enjoy their rights as human beings. Under cover of entertaining reservations linked to cultural specificities, some States are continuing to enforce laws and practise discrimination against women, particularly as regards legal status, access to various resources and rights within the family. It should also be emphasized that African women are the victims of various kinds of aggression and violence in the name of retrograde traditional practices, religious fundamentalism and the negative image of women conveyed by the media and some school curricula.

This degrading treatment is aggravated in countries where civil, economic, social and cultural rights are virtually denied, particularly when women are not informed of their elementary rights.

Given this notorious discrimination against women, we recommend that the World Conference should:

Reaffirm the rights of women as inalienable human rights which all States Members of the United Nations have a duty to protect and promote, particularly by fostering the contribution of women to the formulation of legal provisions in their favour;

Mandate the United Nations specialized agencies to give wide publicity to information on the rights of women and to work to restore the true image of the woman as a dignified component of any society, in cooperation with the non-governmental organizations working in the human rights field in Africa;

Make an assessment of the world human rights situation so as to permit a comparison between the existence of international legal instruments for the protection and promotion of human rights and human rights realities;

Proclaim the precedence of international and regional conventions over national legal instruments;

Ensure that all States Members of the United Nations ratify human rights conventions, particularly those regarding the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women;

Take appropriate sanctions against all those who deliberately perpetuate violations of the rights of women by refusing to ratify or to apply these conventions.

We appreciate the decision of the Commission on Human Rights to prepare a special report on sex-related violence.

Political rights of women

Some African countries continue to distinguish between civil and political rights. This attitude has adverse consequences for the political rights of women, who do not generally participate in policy definition, statute-making and decision-taking. Unless democracy is established, women in these countries will be permanently exposed to alienating and discriminatory legal texts without necessarily having any recourse.

We therefore appeal to the World Conference to reaffirm the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights and to recommend that States Members of the United Nations, international agencies and non-governmental organizations should strengthen measures and develop mechanisms capable of promoting women's participation in decision-making and their large-scale access to responsible, high-ranking positions so as to guarantee their political rights.

Interdependence of human rights and development

In the African continent, there are numerous and growing denials of human rights in the form of mass poverty and extreme destitution. This anachronistic economic gulf between Africa and the situation of plenty in the countries of the North is expressed in various ways in an increasingly precarious living framework which must command the attention of the World Conference.

This situation is felt much more keenly among women and children, particularly in the countries which have opted for the structural adjustment programmes that international agencies make a condition for development assistance. Given the adverse consequences (famine, disease, unemployment, illiteracy, begging, prostitution, etc.) of these development policies for African women, it must be recalled that development cannot be reduced, on the basis of simplistic schemes and an economics-dominated approach to economic growth. There can be no genuine development without social progress. Development is and remains a social, cultural and economic process. The human being must be the focal point of development, which is the backdrop for the exercise of human rights. There is therefore a real interdependence between development and human rights. It should also be emphasized that any development presupposes national and international peace and security, as well as the establishment of true democracy.

We therefore recommend that the World Conference on Human Rights should:

Proclaim development to be an inalienable human right;

Take appropriate measures to ensure that the international community concerns itself not only with material difficulties but also with all forms of cultural, psychological or relational deprivation, as experienced by women and men in Africa;

Ensure that Member States, either individually or collectively, create conditions conducive to the realization of development by enabling women, the other half of humankind, genuinely to benefit from this process of which they are the protagonists;

Ensure that the coming decades should be devoted to the defence of human rights and human rights education, as well as to democracy and the construction of social progress, as defined by the International Congress on Education for Human Rights and Democracy organized by the United Nations and UNESCO in Canada in March 1993;

Take measures to establish pilot centres for human rights education and training providing a whole range of knowledge for humankind;

Mandate its specialized agencies to cooperate with the African States in eliminating obstacles to development and ensuring the full and progressive exercise of the right to development;

Make the right to development of women in conflict situations a subject of concern so that the United Nations General Assembly and the World Conference on Women in 1995 can take appropriate measures to protect and guarantee this right.

SIGNATORIES

Organizations

Réseau Sous-régional Femmes Africaines et Droits Humains (REFAD)

Groupe de Recherche, d'Etudes et de Formation "Femme-Action" (GREFFA) - Burkina Faso

Collectif des Femmes du Mali (COFEM) - Mali

Etude de Recherche, d'Information et de Formation des Femmes (ERIFF) - Togo

WEYBI (women's non-governmental organization, Niger)

Fédération des Vendeuses de Fruits et légumes de la Ville de Ouagadougou

Union Inter-Africaine des Droits de l'Homme (UIDH)

Comité National de lutte contre la pratique de l'excision

Club Guimbi (women's organization, Burkina Faso)

Association pour la Protection de la Défense des Droits de la Femme (APDF) - Bamako

Association Malienne des Droits de l'Homme (AMDH) - Bamako

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